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THE MISCHIEVOUS ICE-PITCHER.

BY WILLIAM A. HAMMOND, SURGEON-GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, RETIRED.

“THERE is death in the pot,” said Mr. Accum to the people of England, in his diatribe against dram-drinking. The words fell with startling force upon those in high and low places, and set up a train of inquiry which nothing but some short and terrible invective like his could have excited. Artists and manufacturers took up his idea and reproduced it on canvas and in almost every plastic material used for decoration or domestic purposes. Preachers announced it from their pulpits and drew fearful pictures of its appositeness ; and, if we are to believe the assertions made at the time, many habitual drunkards were saved from a wretched life and a still more wretched death by being frightened into sobriety. Arguments would have been useless with such people, but a grinning skull looking over the edge of a wine-glass, or a skeleton clasping a decanter in his bony hands, or a snake coiled around the stem of a goblet, caused them to pause as they grasped the poisoned chalice, and to shrink back in terror as they dashed the death-giving vessel to the ground. Many Englishmen renounced their gin and took to tea instead, being further told that it was the “cup that cheers, but not inebriates.”

The notion seems to be prevalent that, in order more effectually to reform a drunkard, his stomach must be drenched with water, and especially ice-water. This idea originated in the United States, and has gradually spread to Great Britain and Ireland and their dependencies. The result is that “cold-water brigades” and “ice-water brigades” have been formed in almost every country where the English language is spoken. Tea-drinking, which received so great an impetus from Mr. Accum’s expressive words, is rapidly giving way before ice-water drinking. Philanthropic

individuals combine and raise money to establish ice-water fountains in the most populous parts of our large cities, and the people are told to shun the liquor-saloon and the beer-cellar and to quaff the refreshing liquid that nature supplies. These good people forget that the ice they put into the water, to make it, as they suppose, more fit for the wants of the human system, is their act and not nature's. I have heard of one repentant distiller who on his death-bed, thinking thereby to atone for the destruction to those who had imbibed his whiskey, appended a codicil to his will by which a considerable sum of money was set apart, the income of which was to be forever devoted to supplying ice-water to all who should apply at the tail of a cart that was to be especially fitted up for the purpose and to be driven through the streets. Probably more were killed by his whiskey than by his ice-water, but that the latter had its victims there can be no doubt.

It is certainly true that more ice-water is drunk in the United States in one year than in all the rest of the world in ten. This fact is in part due to the facility with which ice can be obtained, and the comparatively low price at which it is sold; but our National craving for ice-water cannot be altogether the result of its cheapness, for we find that in Norway and Sweden, and in the high regions of India, South America, and Switzerland, ice-water as a beverage is almost unknown. Certainly, so far as the appetite is concerned, it is the result of education. Young children, or adults not accustomed to drinking ice-water, find it at first not only unpleasant, but positively painful. Infants shudder when it is first put into their mouths, and I have seen American Indians spit and squirm for several minutes after they had been induced to drink a tumbler of ice-cold water; but persistency in this, as in most other matters of food or drink, almost invariably conquers, just as it does with tobacco or alcohol and many other things, which, originally being repulsive, finally become almost indispensable to the comfort or the factitious demands of the system. There must be something inherent in the American organism which prompts to the formation of the habit, just as there is an inborn tendency in us to indulge in the use of "chewing-gum," hot sodden bread, and indigestible pies. If the proclivity were an innocent one, there would not be much to say against it: that it is extremely harmful is not a matter for doubt.

In the first place, it may cause sudden death, especially if indulged in when the body is overheated. A very important part of the nervous system, called the solar plexus, is situated immediately behind the stomach. A severe blow inflicted on the body just over this part of the sympathetic system of nerves will cause death with as great rapidity as will a stab in the heart. Many a so-called man has killed his wife by kicking her in the stomach. It is not the injury to this organ of digestion that produces instantaneous death, but the shock which is given to the solar plexus, and through it to the heart. A big drink of ice-water reduces the temperature of the solar plexus so suddenly that the action of the heart is greatly lessened; sometimes to so great an extent as to cause instant death. It is quite common for persons to feel faint and to become pale immediately after drinking a glass of ice-water. They attribute these effects to heat or over-exertion, or to some other cause which has nothing to do with the result, not knowing that they have so weakened the heart as to prevent its sending a due amount of blood to the lungs and brain, and that, had the water been a little colder, life would possibly have been extinguished altogether. Direct experiment with instruments especially devised for the purpose of measuring the force of the heart's pulsations establish the fact that there is no agent of the *materia medica* more powerful with some persons as a depressant of this organ than a large draught of ice-water. Under certain circumstances it acts with all the force and rapidity of prussic acid.

The people who do the most harm in this direction, in this age and country of ice-water drinking, are the keepers of the so-called mineral-water fountains. Most of them, I am sorry to say, are druggists and chemists who ought to know better. It seems to be the chief object of these vendors of frigid drinks to cool them down to the lowest possible point consistent with fluidity. As these waters generally contain some saline ingredients, they can be reduced below the freezing-point of ordinary water without congealing. It appears from the signs that they display in front of their places of business that the colder they can make these mixtures the more pride they take in themselves and the more customers flock to their shops. Many deaths of persons have occurred while in the very act of drinking these more than ice-cold liquids, and I am, myself, conversant with numerous cases

in which great mental and physical prostration was the result, and from which recovery did not take place for several days. In two of these instances obstinate facial neuralgia, lasting over a year and only yielding to energetic medical treatment and complete change of climate, was induced.

Besides being one of the most prolific causes of neuralgic affections, very cold drinks injure the teeth. They crack the enamel, and therefore increase their liability to decay. Americans as a nation have worse teeth than any other people in the world, and this fact is due more to the excessive use of ice-water than to any other cause. In the old days of slavery the negroes of the South were remarkable for their good teeth, for ice-water was a drink unknown to them. But with freedom, and more money at their disposal than they formerly had, they have taken to tipping the icy liquid, and as a consequence bad teeth are now frequently seen among them.

A person who drinks a great deal of ice-water at meals very materially lessens his ability to enjoy the good things of the table, for the sense of taste is greatly impaired when the temperature of the inside of the mouth is reduced many degrees below the normal standard. Indeed, a very excellent method of counteracting the offensive taste of certain medicines is for the one who is about to swallow them to hold a little ice-water in the mouth for a few moments. The nauseous dose can then be gulped down without a tenth part of its offensiveness being experienced. On the other hand, the delicate flavors of the finest wines are entirely lost to the person who has before drinking them taken a glass of ice-water.

The effect upon the stomach of ice-water drinking is no less marked. As soon as the cold liquid reaches this organ, the blood vessels which are enlarged during the process of digestion, in order that a due amount of gastric juice may be secreted, are at once contracted, and the function is accordingly more or less completely arrested. Confirmed dyspepsia is a necessary consequence, and this frequently assumes the form of gastric catarrh, than which few disorders are more intractable. Nor does the morbid action cease here. Many a case of obstinate diarrhœa owes its origin to the refrigeration of the sympathetic ganglia of the abdomen induced by ice-water. There is some reason to believe that cancer of the stomach, a disease certainly more frequent among Americans than other people, is likewise one of its consequences.

It has been asserted by some medical writers that excessive ice-water drinking is a prolific cause of Bright's disease of the kidneys. There does not seem, however, as yet, to be sufficient evidence to support this view, but it is, nevertheless, quite possible that it is not altogether unfounded. Judging by analogy, and by what we know of the effects of ice-water upon other internal organs, I see no reason to doubt that the kidneys may also be brought under its morbid influence. So long as there is a reasonable doubt upon the subject, it would seem to be prudent for those who are predisposed to kidney disease to drink water considerably above the temperature of thirty-two degrees.

Water for drinking purposes should never be below fifty degrees. We can almost always get it even in the hottest weather as cool as this by letting it run for a minute or two from any household faucet, or drawing it from any country well. If not, there is no objection to cooling it to the point mentioned. The East India "monkey," which can now be had almost any where in this country, and by means of which the contained water is cooled by its own evaporation, answers the purpose admirably. I am quite sure that, if ice-water should be generally discarded as a drink, the average duration of life would be lengthened and existence rendered more tolerable.

WILLIAM A. HAMMOND.